



Democratic Institutions and Infrastructures in the Digital Age Still a Parliament?

Digital Humanism Summer School Vienna – 6 July 2026

Christoph Konrath & Anna Rathmair



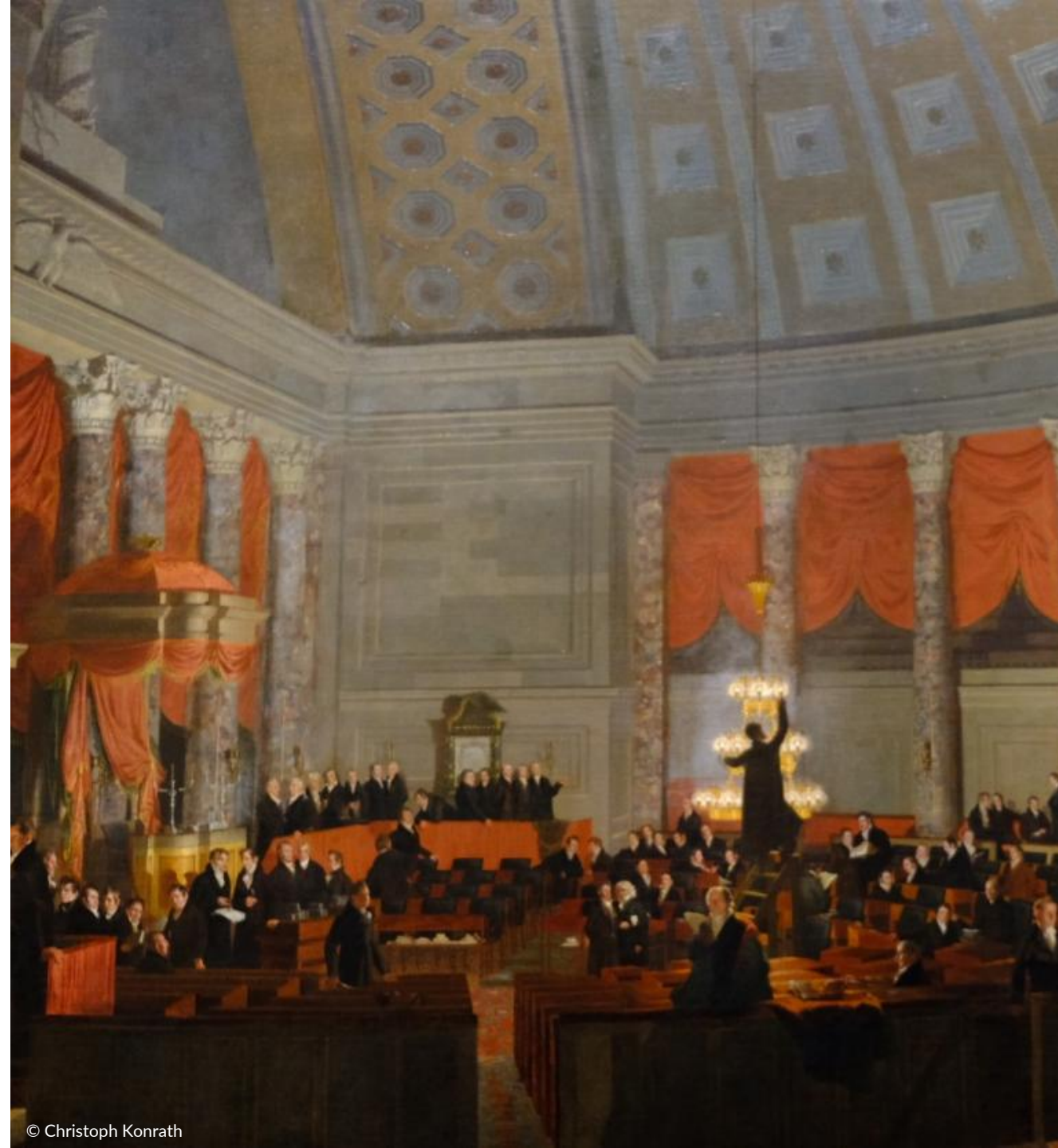
Common theories and ontologies

Theories and ontologies of parliaments presuppose material and technological infrastructures.

Parliamentary studies and public images of parliaments are misaligned with the reality of parliaments.

New lines of research can expand minimalistic concepts of parliaments, react to institutional crisis and attempt to keep pace with technological change.

Still, it can be difficult to connect them to the discourses about digitalisation of democracy, society and law.





Machines and gaps

Thinking on parliaments is formed by the age of big machines.

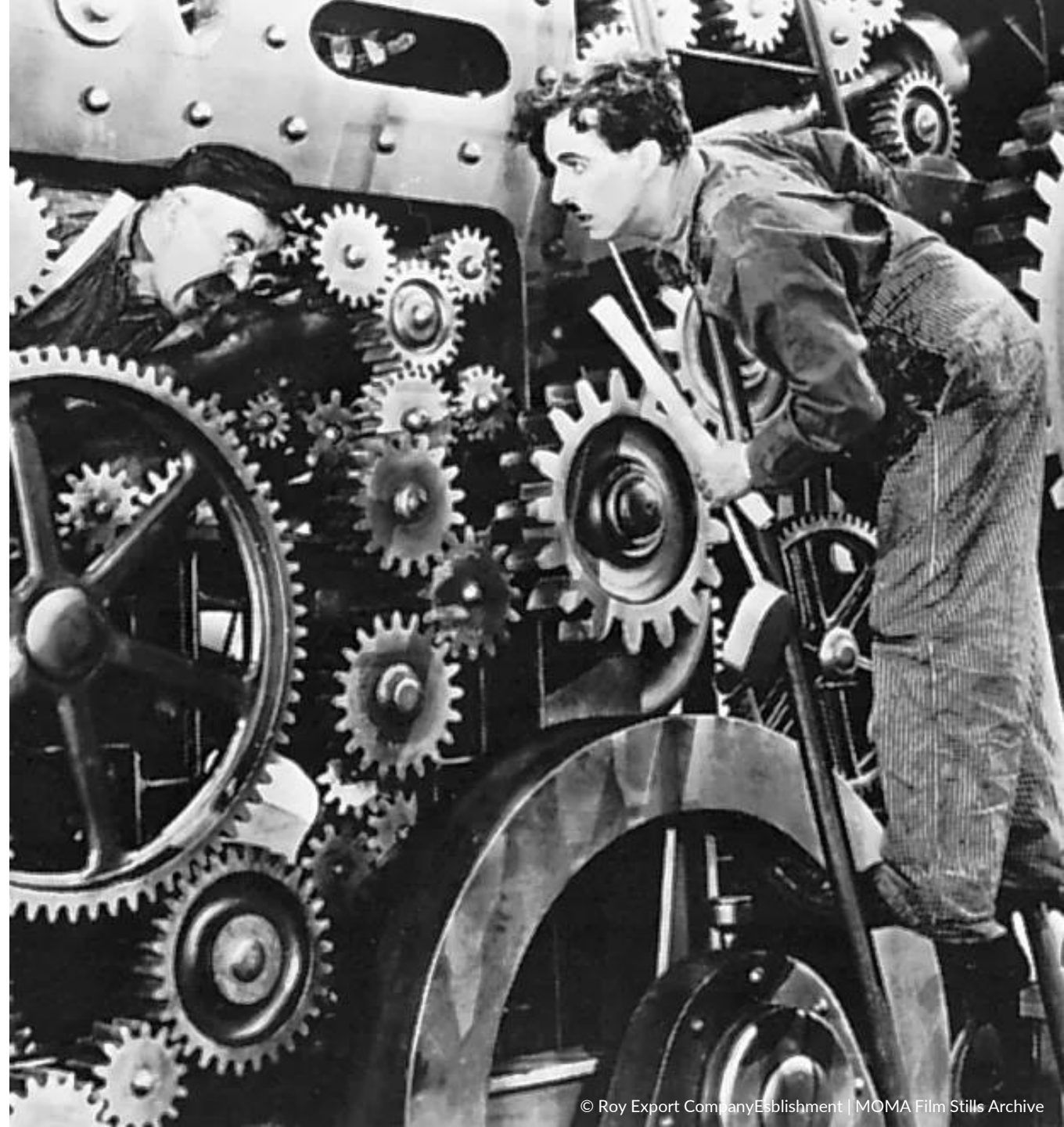
It is confronted with two 'double gaps':

Public | Parliament – Technology | Law.

Democracy | Infrastructure – Data | Rules

It needs more than adopting and regulating technology.

It has to have a conception of a networked public constituted and disrupted by technology, a conception of digital and physical spaces and human-technological interaction (socio-technical assemblage).





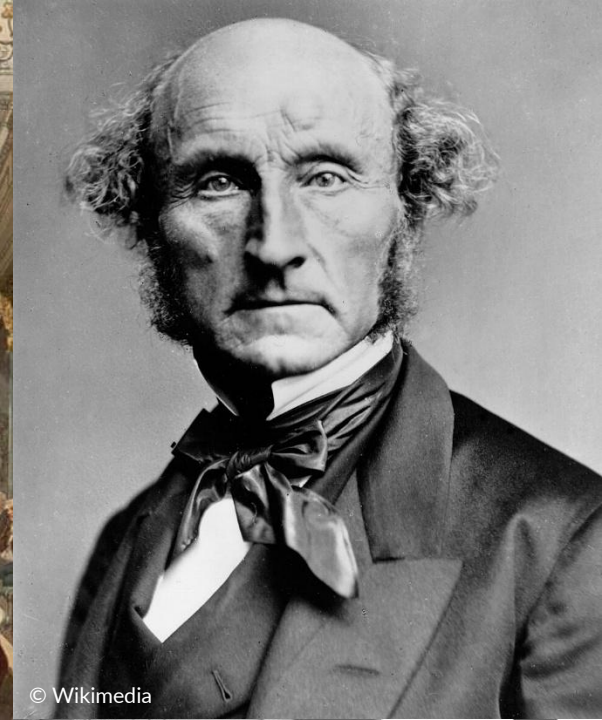
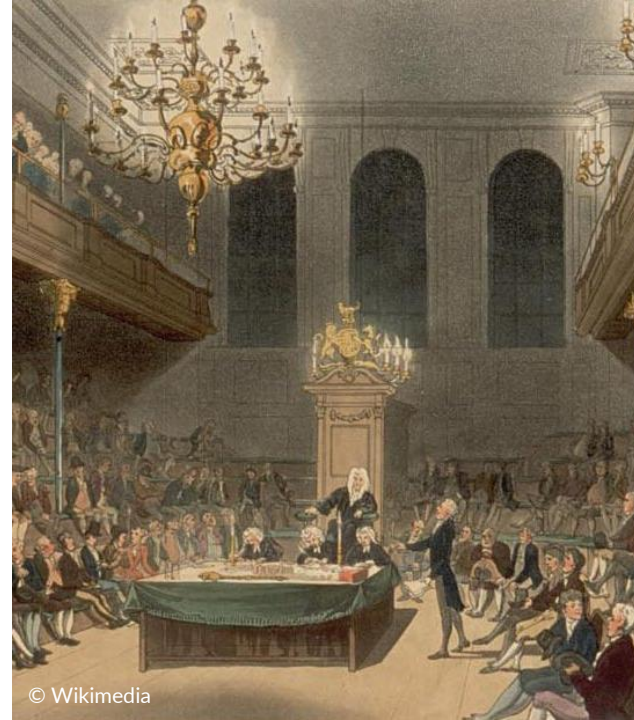
Thinking about what we are doing

It can capture the link between acting and thinking that informs research.

It can capture that parliaments are shaped by a multitude of actors, spaces, rules and technologies.

It is connected to the development of classical theories of parliamentarism (and the matter-of-factness of infrastructures).

It can be used to think within the technological contexts we find ourselves in.





Rigidity, plurality, intermediary, resonance

Parliaments create a situational counterbalance to bureaucratisation and tightly controlled constellations.

Parliaments make diversity and conflicts visible. They create meeting points of majorities and minorities.

Parliaments are intermediary institutions that interrupt the course of events and the exercise of power.

Parliaments create spaces for democratic resonance.

Parliaments are material and political infrastructures of knowledge.





The tides of digitalisation

Design choices and configurations can limit the scope for action.

Plurality and conflicts can be managed with workflows. Legal (indirect) control can become algorithmic, data driven and direct control.

Intermediary institutions can be sidelined by overarching steering models.

Spaces for communication can be unbounded and wither away.

A theoretical framework cannot simply involve adapting to technologies but must also address the question of how to counteract the pull effects of the tides of digitalisation.

THEY
REPLACE
THINKING
WITH
CLIPPING



Integration and opposition

When we think about what we do, we must acknowledge that the work of parliaments and parliamentarians is shaped by digital technologies.

Parliamentarians benefit from digital technologies and want to take full advantage of them.

When we think about what we do, we must also consider those, who oppose this – who think against what we do. Criticism of democracy and parliamentarism is more often than not driven by technological change.





Buildings, boundaries and disruptions

Parliaments are built spaces and boundary objects. They define a political community and a space of action. They have opened up and are disrupted.

Thinking about parliaments must include the interaction between digitally networked publics and parliaments.

Parliaments must be able to build and uphold their own boundaries and thus the democratic quality of technological, procedural and media interruptions.





Optimisation and aggression

Optimisation, efficiency and controllability can lead to an increased restriction of scope of action.

They can facilitate the execution of optimised programmes rather than the exercise of judgements and fuel aggression.

Parliaments can be antidotes to passions through procedures and practice, they can be theatres of passions and catalysts of them.

We can acknowledge these dimensions and recognise how they are intertwined with and fuelled by technological designs and infrastructures.

We can ask how digitally networked publics can be integrated with parliaments so that people can recognise themselves as active members of a political community.





Epistemic actors

Thinking about what we are doing can let us perceive that parliaments are epistemic actors who are integrated in communication networks.

If democracy is a reaction to shared uncertainty, then its realisation and future will depend on factors such as expertise, relevance, inclusivity and transparency.

Parliaments must have the knowledge, skills, personnel and material resources to function as epistemic actors.



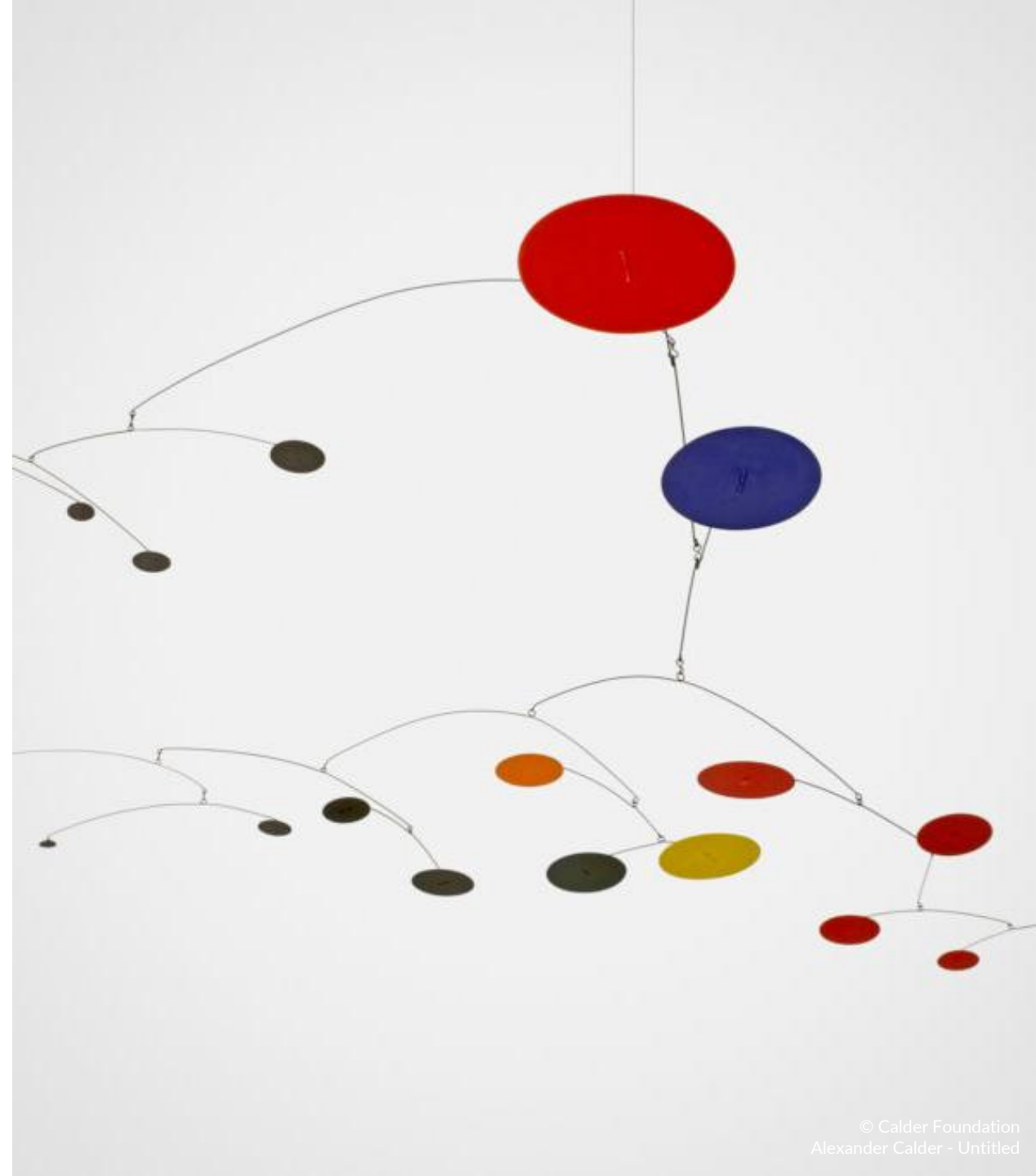


Different perspectives

Parliaments need to be understood as intermediary institutions in which people are able to reflectively engage with technologies.

These building blocks help to avoid the “workflow trap” from the outset.

In that way, we can develop a new theoretical framework that contributes to the creation of meaning and the defense of parliamentary democracy in the face of technological and social upheavals.





Questions and Ideas



Digital Governance in the Austrian Parliament



How?

By taking a cross-departmental, interdisciplinary, and step-by-step approach. This is what happens in the Digital Governance Advisory Board.





What are we currently discussing in depth?

- ♦ Data Catalog + Data Quality Policy
 - ♦ AI Strategy + AI Registry + AI Portal
 - ♦ Institution-wide Digital Literacy Formats
 - ♦ Strategic Demand Management (Process for Reviewing, Evaluating, and Implementing Digital Projects)
-



How do we support staff?

AI terms of use, information security policies, privacy policies, etc., provide security. Basic training workshops and communities of practice (e.g., Let's Prompt Together and Digital Agora) build skills, while subject-specific luncheons, subject-specific dossiers, and the library build knowledge.

Die Freunde sahen sich skeptisch an, aber Ralph
»Ich habe entdeckt, dass hinter den Schatten un
Spiegelungen des Alltags verborgene Botschaft
Zeichen existieren. Mit dieser Brille kann ich sie
und verstehen. Es ist, als ob ein Schleier gelüfte
ich einen Blick auf die verborgene





Group Sessions

- ♦ Franco Accordino
 - ♦ Ittai Bar-Siman-Tov: **AI in Parliaments and Lawmaking**
 - ♦ Christoph Konrath & Anna Rathmair: **Digital Literacy in Democratic Institutions**
 - ♦ Monika Lanzenberger
 - ♦ Katharina Pötz & Nada Ragheb: **Data Quality**
 - ♦ Ada Sporer & Nikolaus Ebner: **Public Consultation as Part of the Legislative Proceedings**
-



Group Sessions until 5:30pm



Thank you!